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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 003840

SIPDIS

NSC STAFF FOR ABRAMS/POUNDS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: AYMAN NOUR, SUPPORTERS FACING HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION

Classified by A/DCM Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) Sustained threats, intimidation, and harassment are making it "impossible" for Ayman Nour, the embattled leader of the opposition Ghad Party, to conduct his presidential campaign, according to his wife (and closest confidante and advisor) Gamila Ismail. Ismail accuses the ruling NDP, with the complicity of police and security officials, of orchestrating the harassment and hiring thugs to carry it out. She described a widely-reported May 5 incident, in which Nour's campaign convoy was stoned, with a number of supporters injured, as a new low point. Ismail asserted that, in the face of constant harassment, Nour and advisors were moving closer to a decision to withdraw from the race. This assertion could reflect more the wishes of Nour's wife than a firm predictor of his intentions. In our own recent encounters with him (and his recent encounters with others) he has given no indication that he is contemplating withdrawal. We will continue work to corroborate information on Nour's intentions and on developments in his campaign, his legal case, and his party. In any case, we deem credible charges that incidents of harassment and intimidation against Nour's campaign are orchestrated - rather than the spontaneous actions of "irate" citizens. End summary.

12. (C) Poloff met on May 16 with Gamila Ismail (protect throughout), Ayman Nour's wife and closest advisor, at her request. Ismail asserted that sustained incidents of harassment, intimidation and violence, perpetrated by "thugs" in the employ of the GOE, and tolerated by police, were taking a serious toll on the morale of Nour, his inner circle, and supporters. Ismail said that the May 5 incident in the Nile Delta province of Sharqiya (about 70 kilometers northeast of Cairo) had constituted a new low in her husband's efforts to campaign for president and had prompted them to reflect on their strategy.

13. (C) As described in multiple Egyptian and international media accounts, Nour, Ismail, and about 150 Ghad Party supporters were on their way to open a new provincial party headquarters and stage a rally in support of Nour's run for president on the evening of May 5 when they were halted in the town of Kafr al-Saqr, near Zagazig, by cars and a crowd blocking the road. A several-hour standoff ensued, as Nour and colleagues at first attempted to negotiate passage through the gauntlet, but retreated to their vehicles when faced with aggressive taunts by the hostile crowd (e.g. "Hey Nour, why don't you share some the two million dollars (he is alleged, in rumors, to have received by the USG) with us?") and forced to dodge flying rocks, stones, and bottles.

14. (C) Nour and party eventually extricated themselves and returned to Cairo, but not before, according to Ismail and multiple press accounts, one bus carrying Ghad supporters was overturned by the mob, and 11 Ghad members had to be hospitalized with injuries. Several press accounts following the event quoted an (anonymous) police source characterizing the incident as one in which "thousands of people (in the village) expelled Nour and his supporters," and another security source told a Cairo weekly "we warned him (Nour) not to go because the people were angry with him for nominating himself, but he refused to listen to us." Commenting on the May 5 incident, Ghad Party official Wael Nowara told the press "This shows how the regime tolerates opposition and its true intentions toward having real democracy and elections."

15. (C) Ismail opined that Egyptian State Security, and the ruling NDP, whom she identifies as co-conspirators orchestrating the campaign against her husband, had "gotten smart" by forsaking obvious acts of intimidation by the GOE in favor of employing thugs (mainly criminals and ex-convicts, she believes) to harass Nour and his supporters and to incite others to do the same. These thugs, she continued, can be portrayed by police, and the ruling NDP, as "common citizens" incensed by reports of Nour's corruption and the disrespect he has shown to President Mubarak.

16. (C) The May 5 incident was only the most dramatic, in

Ismail's view, of what she described as a sustained and intense campaign of harassment directed at Nour, other Ghad party leaders, and party rank and file. She cited as another example of orchestrated intimidation their experience at the April 27 demonstration by the Kifaya protest movement, at which she alleged that thugs humiliated and roughed up veteran human rights activist Amir Salim (who also heads up Nour's legal defense team) under the watchful eye of senior uniformed police officers. She added that she, her husband, and other senior Ghad figures are under constant, overt surveillance.

17. (C) Ismail asserted that "NDP thugs" had singled out Nour's constituency of Bab al-Shariya', a crowded working class Cairo neighborhood, for "special treatment," plastering the area with banners taunting Nour as "the agent of the foreigners" and "the son of Madeleine," (a reference to a popular Cairo rumor that Madeleine Albright (who visited Cairo in January) had recruited Nour, with whom she shook hands at a dinner party, to become a U.S. puppet). A U.S. journalist visiting Cairo recently joked to poloff that "you can tell you are getting near Ayman Nour's constituency when you start to see all the banners insulting him." Ismail also claimed that "thugs" she believed to be convicts disrupted on May 4 Nour's weekly Wednesday-evening meeting with his constituents, shouting him down as an "agent" and a "traitor" and intimidating other attendees. The incident had been so demoralizing to Nour, Ismail stated, that he had declined to hold a constituents' meeting the following Wednesday.

18. (C) Ismail maintained to poloff that the ongoing harassment, intimidation, and violence was leading Nour closer to a decision to withdraw from the race. Such a decision was not easy (and still could be changed), she stated, but asked rhetorically "How can we campaign if we are surrounded by thugs blocking our path and insulting and threatening us everywhere we go?" She added that Nour was increasingly stressed not only by recent incidents of harassment, but because of his looming trial on criminal forgery charges, set to begin June 28. The trial, she predicted, will also be packed with thugs paid to jeer Nour and counter any demonstrations of sympathy and support for him in and around the court.

Comment

19. (C) We take with a grain of salt Ismail's assertion that Nour is on the verge of withdrawing from the race. While it may prove true, Nour showed no sign of being worn down and ready to quit when he received visiting Senator Frist on May 5 (just hours before the Sharqiya incident). In a more recent meeting with a western journalist, Nour again evinced defiance and vowed to stay in the race. It is possible that Ismail (as a tired and beleaguered wife and mother of two teenagers) was more reflecting her hope that Nour would withdraw than precisely describing her husband's intentions. (We will continue work to corroborate information on Nour's intentions, as well as developments in his campaign, his legal case, and his party.)

110. (C) Nour should qualify as a presidential candidate under the terms of the proposed constitutional amendment (which will be put to a public referendum, expected to pass, on May 25). It is still possible, however, that revisions to the law on political rights, which parliament should complete before its current session expires in several weeks, will include a clause excluding those indicted on criminal charges from presidential candidacy (and perhaps from holding a parliamentary seat).

111. (C) We deem credible the accusations of Nour, Ismail, and other Ghad Party contacts that thugs hired by the NDP and tolerated by police, rather than self-motivated irate citizens, are behind incidents of harassment and intimidation. Ordinary Egyptian citizens are very accustomed to corrupt politicians (especially in the ruling NDP) and not often given to spontaneous, public acts of outrage against them. Even if the forgery charges Nour is facing are true, this would register relatively low on the scale of Egyptian political corruption. Moreover, it is noteworthy that anti-Nour banners posted in his constituency, and reported taunts from thugs in the crowd, focus not on the forgery charges but rather on (ludicrous) claims that he is a "foreign agent" who has accepted large amounts of money from the USG and/or Israel.

112. (C) Harassment and intimidation targetting Nour can only be intended to force his withdrawal from the race. While probably an objective of old-school NDP elements intent on facilitating Mubarak's reelection, Nour's withdrawal (under such circumstances) would make it more difficult for the GOE to portray this year's presidential race as a fair one featuring viable, critical competition. End comment.

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